

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED

"HOUSEHOLD WORDS"

No. 455. NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 18, 1877.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

STRANGE WATERS.

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BOOK I.

CHAPTER I. THE FIVE ADZES.

GREAT Job, the god of thunder,
And March, the god of war,
And Neptune with his tried 'un,
Apollyon with his cur—
And all the gods terrestrial
Ascended on their spears,
To view with ad-mi-ra-ti-on
The British Grennydiers.

The singer took advantage of the chorus to bury his face modestly in his pewter tankard, and then went on again to the same tune :

Some talk o' Harry Saunders,
And some o' merry glees ;
Of coal, and Alice Andrews,
And all such folks as these.
But it is my opinion,
There's none for to compear,
With that brave and ancient Nero,
The British Grennydier.

And once more the singer made up during the chorus for the enforced abstinence of his solo.

It was a furiously wet night without. The rain was coming down in a torrent, nay, in a deluge, and a battery of hail rattled on the windows. Altogether, it was a fine atmosphere of contrast, for those who had the good fortune to sit round the long deal table within. They were not of the sort that want cushions and backs to their chairs. Long, bare, wooden forms did as well for them as for their grandfathers—for their great-grandfathers for that matter. For the Five Adzes had been known in the parish of Laxton—Lass'n, as the natives called it—from time whereof the memory of man runneth not

to the contrary. The oldest inhabitant had sat on a deal form in the parlour of the Five Adzes, and had never dreamed of a time when not even one adze had been hung out for a sign.

I am half ashamed to admit that the floor was sanded. Nobody likes to admit that his reader has guessed rightly ; but truth is truth, and must be told. Not only so, but the room had a chimney-corner—and altogether the room was the most conventional bar-parlour that even that creature of conventions, the teller of stories, ever imagined, or reproduced at second-hand. It therefore needs no description. Two and two make four, and the parlour of the Five Adzes was the parlour of the Five Adzes, and there is an end. But the evening was not at an end, though it was near upon nine o'clock—a terribly late hour for Lass'n.

Nor, apparently was the song.

Whene'er we are remanded
To storm the parish shades,
Our leaders march with fuchsi-as,
And we with—

Suddenly, the singer stopped—not this time to bury his face in his tankard, but to stare at the door.

"Pray don't let me disturb you, gentlemen," said a pleasant voice. "It's a fine song, and well sung, and I want to hear the end."

Nor was the appearance of the new guest in the least calculated to interrupt harmony. He was a bright-looking young man of six or seven and twenty, with a fair brown beard and moustache, trimmed artistically short, all gleaming, glistening, and dripping with rain, like a Triton's fresh from the sea. He shook himself like a dog just out of a pond, threw his knapsack

on the end of one form and his cap on the end of another, walked straight to the chimney-corner and looked round him encouragingly, as if he were perfectly at home.

He was a few years older than when we met him at Lindenheim, but there was no mistaking the clear open forehead and the laugh left in the eyes, though hidden in the new-worn beard, and the free air with which he at once accepted the situation and made himself at home. And one instinctively felt that, had he fallen on his legs in the midst of a cabinet council, instead of in the parlour of the Five Adzes, he would have been no less completely at his ease.

They were quick eyes with which he glanced round, and will serve to see with excellently. At the head of the long table sat the singer; a strapping fellow, tall and broad-shouldered, with velvet jacket and gaiters—perhaps a gamekeeper. People carry their callings upon them, to eyes like Walter Gordon's. By his side sat one who was, perhaps, the parish clerk, more probably the parish clerk's deputy—most certainly, a shoemaker. And so on round the table, the most noteworthy persons of Lass'n, who were above the rank of labourer, sat, and smoked long churchwardens, and buried their noses from time to time in tankards of ale. They neither laughed nor smiled, with the exception of one man, whose smile was indelible.

"He is the sexton," thought Walter Gordon.

The people of Lass'n were not more given to inhospitality than their neighbours, but when men meet together, night after night, to drink ale out of the same old tankards, and to listen to the same song, without seeing a stranger from year's end to year's end, an intruder is safe to be an element of discord. The song had grown accustomed to certain pairs of ears, and felt shy when called on to make the old, familiar impression on a new pair, however ready and willing. The British Grenadiers, for once in their history, lost courage. In fact, all but Walter Gordon were habitués of the Five Adzes; and yet Walter Gordon alone seemed to be at home. It is true he had his back to the chimney-corner; and that gives a man an advantage everywhere.

"You look a bit dampish, master," said the deputy parish clerk after long deliberation, and critically.

"Well, that's no reason I should act like

a wet blanket. Come—if you don't let me hear the end of that song, I shall go out into the rain again."

The deputy parish clerk appeared to nudge the gamekeeper. But the gamekeeper abstractedly took a draught from his pewter and watched the cloud from his pipe like a metaphysician in a dream.

Still the rain came down with a steady sweep and rush, and the hailstones rattled against the panes. The great kitchen clock ticked as if keeping time to the music of the rain, and Walter Gordon, having filled and lighted his own pipe, stood waiting for the inevitable eggs and bacon, and surveyed the silent parliament of Laxton. A long day's tramp over a heavy country, the clouded atmosphere of a tavern parlour, the portentous silence of his chance companions, the persistent rush of rain, and the monotonous ticking combined to bring on that feeling of satisfied fatigue, which is one of the grand pleasures of those who know the feeling of a knapsack on their shoulders. Not being in love, and knowing nothing of the shyness that most men feel in the company of those whom, as their inferiors, they feel obliged to treat with condescending bonhomie, he let his thoughts travel about with the smoke of his pipe, and looked and listened at dreamy ease.

In truth, he was a man to be envied, irrespectively of the pleasures of a good appetite with the supper of a country inn before it, a temper that liked wet weather, a long tramp, and perfect peace of mind. If we know little of him, it is not because what we do not know is any secret—nothing was ever a secret about Walter Gordon since he was born. I am well-nigh as ashamed about his want of mystery as of the commonplace, conventional picturesqueness of The Five Adzes.

He was a rolling-stone and he gathered no moss; but that matters nothing when it is covered with moss before it begins to roll. Gordon's Mill, since the first Gordon came over the Border with half-a-crown in his stocking-foot, had flourished and prospered, and it prospered and flourished still. In fact, Walter Gordon had been born in the very purple of trade. He might roll a long way, even downhill, without having any of the moss rubbed from him. His father did not toil that he might spend. Hundreds of hands toiled that he might roll easily. Is it strange that he should have been found in Bohemian Lindenheim? Not a whit stranger

than that he should be standing with a wet jacket in the bar-parlour of The Five Adzes. No stranger than if he had been met in a Red Indian wigwam or an African diamond-field. Given a young Englishman with full lungs and full pocket—where is it strange to find him? He is no Alphonse, to be looked for on the Boulevard, and, if not there, in the Morgue.

He belonged to the third generation of commerce; that is to say, he was neither the self-made man nor the parvenu—he was of the generation that had a grandfather. And, young as he was, he had seen many sides of life, had enjoyed them all, and looked forward to enjoying many more, before settling down to whatever career might suit him best after a thorough taste of the cream of each and the bitter of none. He had known Horchester and Oxford. He had played at studying law in London, medicine in Paris, philosophy in Jena, music in Lindenheim. And now he had found out that his true vocation was to be a painter. Why not? Why should not a man, who can pay for the luxury, grasp as much life as he can in his time—why should he narrow himself in one groove, for the sake of imitating those who have the misfortune to be born poor? Surely it is good to be one thing if one must, but all things if one can.

He was an only son. Only sons are proverbially—if there were such a proverb—born to vex the souls of their fathers and break the hearts of their mothers; unless indeed they turn out milksops, and are smothered out of manhood by petting. Whatever truth there may be in that non-existent proverb, Walter Gordon was saved from being an awful example thus far by—being spoiled. Everybody had combined to spoil him; and the universal sunshine, that had been his lot in the world, had made him the finest fair-weather sailor that ever was known. And, as fair weather was his destiny, to have made him anything else would be to have made him ill. What need is there of wasting the qualities of an Arctic explorer on the captain of a pleasure-boat? Give him pleasant ways, and his career is fulfilled.

To a man of his temper, thorough-going bodily discomfort is a positive joy. It gives a piquant flavour to a life of ease. To stand in smoking clothes, hungry and thirsty, in the ungenial parlour of The Five

Adzes, with no comrade but a pipe, was as welcome to Walter Gordon as to stand in his everyday shoes would have been to a real landscape-painter with his bread to earn—for a change. Poor of nature must he be to whom vagrant freedom is not one of the grandest of luxuries; the doubtful fare, the chance lodging, the power to stay or go on as caprice may order, the openness to adventure, the scorn of weather, the day without duties, and the night without dreams. What do steam-travellers know of the delightful temptation to stray out of the high road, in order not to lose the chance of being lost on a moor? Steam is good after all—it leaves the by-paths and the corners sacred to those who love them. There was a railway line within three miles of Laxton, but it left Laxton more out of the world than when the coach used to pass through it, when the oldest inhabitant was a school-boy.

And now, there is no need to follow the thoughts of Walter Gordon, for the very sufficient reason that he had no thoughts to follow. He had tramped a good five-and-thirty miles that day, and was half asleep on his legs as he stood with his back to the chimney, waiting for eggs and bacon, and lazily listening to the rush of the rain.

Such conditions of mind and body can have but one end. In fifteen minutes from his interruption of the song that formed the sole recreation of Laxton, he was asleep in the chimney-corner, with his legs stretched out along the settle and his knapsack for a pillow. He had retired from the world, and did not even enter that of dreams.

But dreams will come.

How long he slept he knew not. But surely, when he thought he woke, he was dreaming still.

It is The Five Adzes, remember—in the most conventional of country villages the most conventional village inn. The rain still came down; the hailstones still beat against the window-panes. The long deal table still stretched along the sanded floor. Even as when he entered there was singing. But it was not The British Grenadiers, or any Laxton version of that famous march, and the singer was not the gamekeeper. In short, he could not believe his ears—or his eyes.

He had been in Italy—perhaps that was mixing with his dreams.

At any rate, what he saw was as inconsistent with an English village inn as The British Grenadiers would have been with a village tavern in Calabria.

The room was filled with an atmosphere of awe-struck wonder. In the gamekeeper's chair sat the gamekeeper—transformed indeed. He had become a woman—and a woman who was less to be looked for in The Five Adzes of Laxton, than in any conceivable spot in the whole of the rest of the world.

Walter Gordon was used to wayside adventures, and was not given to dreaming when he tumbled across them. But he rubbed his eyes now. She was no roadside ballad-singer who might, on a wet night, have managed to tumble into the respectable society of the parish clerk, the sexton, and the under-gamekeeper. She was a full-made, handsome woman, of the most uncertain of all ages which may be called Midsummer, when Spring is forgotten, while Autumn as yet has made no sign. Though it was a warm summer rain that was falling, she was dressed in a travelling dress of furs, that even a man's eye could tell at a glance must have brought a small fortune to the tradesman who had had the making of it, and there was an air about it of having been paid for in francs rather than in pounds. Her complexion was of a marvellously brilliant fairness—so brilliant indeed as to surpass the ordinary work of nature, and to be out of harmony with a pair of large brown eyes framed by long black lashes and eyebrows of the opposite colour to her hair, which was of the brightest golden brown. There was a want of youth—of nothing else—in the outline of her face, but no sign as yet that youth had gone; and her beautiful brown eyes shone with light, almost with laughter, in the flicker of the tallow candles on the long deal board. Walter's eyes went instinctively to her hands—he always looked to a woman's hands next to her eyes. He did not see her hands, but he saw a pair of the most exquisite gloves that ever visited a connoisseur in his wildest dreams, though they were not of the smallest size. Her features—to which he turned after her gloves—were nearly as regular as a sculptor could ask for in his model, save that there was a symptom of over-depression about the region of the nostrils, and that there was one shade too much decision about the curve of the chin.

She was not an Englishwoman; and there-

fore her precise station, socially speaking, was hard to read. She might be a vagrant princess, or she might be otherwise; but to take her for an Englishwoman was out of the question. No Englishwoman would have worn furs in July, or have been so brown or so fair at once, or have had that easy carriage of the shoulders, that even her travelling-dress could not conceal. And, above all, no Englishwoman could have sung to the most select of audiences in the voice, and with the style, wherein she was astounding the parliament of Laxton.

I hold the true Englishwoman's voice to be the sweetest on earth, whether she speaks or whether she sings. But, for its very sweetness, it lacks intensity and power. It wants the great dramatic tone, which distinguishes a flood from a river. The village gamekeeper, the village sexton, the parish clerk, were being bewildered, with open eyes, open ears, open mouths, by all the bravura of the richest and fullest soprano ever heard off the stage—never, it may be sworn, in the sanded parlour of a village inn.

Walter Gordon closed his eyes again, and dreamed he was at the opera. And surely—surely he had heard that voice before? Had he not heard that very song elsewhere?

He listened to the end with closed eyes, invisible in his chimney-corner. Then followed a laugh, almost—but not quite—as musical as the song.

"Bravissima!" he exclaimed. But she took no notice, even if she heard. And that told tales. A singer who was not extremely used to "Bravissima" would not have failed to notice a word, as little to be expected in The Five Adzes as her own self and her own song.

He waited to see what would happen next—for surely this was no everyday adventure, and was not to be spoiled before its time. And he thought: "Surely I have heard that very voice, but where? There are no two voices like that in the world."

Again he regarded her, more intently this time, through his half-closed eyes. She was handsome, beyond question. But—well, there was no disguising the matter; there was a want of nature as well as of youth even about her smile. It was as bright as diamonds; but not as sweet as roses. It suggested the stage, even there, where the audience was listening with its mouths and eyes rather than with its ears. And there was a touch of easy, contemptuous humour about it too, which robbed

it of half its charm, as if she were singing to these bores to mock rather than to please. But there was nothing but polished sweetness in her voice as she said, with a slow, clear, southern accent:

"Now, my friends, I will hear you. It is your turn."

She did not, like the gamekeeper, bury her face in pewter. But she took up an immense black fan, and used it to keep the smoke of shag away from her throat and nostrils, smiling serenely and benignly the while.

Walter Gordon had by this time convinced himself that he was really awake, and was not confusing dreams of the opera with the realities of *The Five Adzes*. Shyness was never his foible, and a sudden impulse seized him. He retreated into the farthest corner of the chimney, and began the *Serenade* from *Don Juan*.

The fan stopped. The lady, princess, prima-donna, whoever she was, looked at the gamekeeper. It was not he. Then at the sexton, then at the clerk, then all round the table—in vain. Then she struck the table with her fan, and called:

"Prosper!"

If there was any doubt about her being a foreigner, there was none about his being one who came in from the passage. Frenchman was written all over him, from the curl of his hat-brim to the tips of his fingers. And if she only suggested the foot-lights, he advertised them.

"Prosper, go to the chimney," she said, still in English, "and find for me the gentleman that sings so bad—so very bad indeed. And ask him to leave off, if you please."

Her speech was rude and not witty; but it made the Laxton people grin. She, with all her outlandish look, had somehow found a shorter road to their unsympathetic sympathies than Walter Gordon. "She is one of them," he thought to himself; but, though he was a musician and an amateur, he was not offended, not even though he had intended to turn the tables of surprise, and had failed.

But he was not going to wait for Monsieur Prosper to fetch him. He came out from his corner and bowed. The lady put the edge of the fan to her lips and looked at him over it with the gravest of airs. He waited for her to speak, hat in hand.

He did not think himself embarrassed. He believed himself, by his silence and exaggeration of deference, to be throwing the weight of the situation upon her. But,

as she probably thought the same, they stood and sat thus till the steady look of her large eyes, into which she had called the most intense gravity, called up a tinge of colour into his face; he felt it, and everybody knows how a blush grows. There was no boldness about her look, only the perfection of calmness and ease.

Gradually, as she watched the colour mount in him, a smile woke up in her eyes, then a laugh, and then she rattled her fan together. He, also, could not help a smile; partly in sympathy with hers, partly at his own new sensation of having wanted ease.

"It was you, then, monsieur, who said, 'Bravissima?'" she said very sweetly.

"Naturally, mademoiselle. I thought I was asleep; but I have a habit of saying 'Bravissima' when I hear you."

"No! You have heard me?"

"Who has not, mademoiselle?"

"No?"

He felt she was regarding now not himself, but his weather-beaten hat, his soaked clothes, and the vagrant look that, as an artist on foot, he had exaggeratedly affected; and was pleased that he had no more look of having heard her than the gamekeeper.

"Yes," he said. "I have heard you in Paris and in Vienna. Not in London yet; but now in Laxton, where I welcome you in the name of the people."

"Oh dear, it is terrible! You know me, then?"

"If you permit me, mademoiselle."

"It is equal; but I will see. Who am I then?"

"What voice is like yours but your own? You are Mademoiselle Clari."

EARLY WORKERS.

COMPOSING.

"THE very first step, then, when an Early Worker begins composing, is——"

"To learn his letters."

"Why, of course! That can be understood. Who would think of a boy and composition, unless the boy knew his A, B, C?"

The knowing an A, B, C, however, was not the question. As much as that was brought to comprehension by a quick method.

"Bring p, d, h, b, q, small," was the command of the master-printer, standing amongst the group of busy little boys who were his staff of pupils; upon which,

almost as soon as he had spoken, five little slips of lead were placed in his hand, and he presented them, face forward, in a close upright row.

"Are letters so easy now?" enquired the printing-master. "Can the b be picked from those, and shown to me?"

The picking was done in all confidence, and the letter extracted. The picking was—wrong. So an a might be recognisable, possibly, under any conditions; the same of c, the same of many another of the scores and scores of characters with which a poor little Early Worker, on applying his young mind to composing, would have to become familiar. But some letters, when they are topsy-turvy—some letters, when they are compulsorily put right side for left, and left for right—defy identification on mere casual acquaintance. We were obliged to acknowledge, therefore, that to learn them was absolutely a first necessity.

"Well; the second lesson, then, of an Early Worker beginning composing is——"

"To learn his cases."

It sounded more absurd still. "Oh yes, of course—'hic, hæc, hoc,' nom., pos., obj., and other equivalents—beyond a doubt; it is clear it must be so!"

But cases at composing, it came to be seen, were not accusative and so forth. Cases were the large, flat, wooden slides or boxes, with many tiny compartments or divisions in them (conceivable at once, if feminine minds are to be influenced, by likening them to magnified workbox-trays, with the pretty satin padding peeled right off), into each nest of which is put a particular letter, and over all of which half-a-dozen Early Workers were occupied, silent and intent. Laid slantwise and high up were these begrimed old slides or boxes, two for each Early Worker to stand by; the lower box at a gentle angle, the upper so much more aslope that it was a wonder it did not shoot its leaden contents out over the head of its young user, like a sharp shower of flat, oblong hail. Such "cases" required learning distinctly enough—one glance brought that fact home to us. Such cases must present some awkward puzzles to a perturbed little Early Worker. It would not have been so bad, supposing the first of the tiny compartments in these old boxes had held a's, the second b's, the third c's, the fourth d's, and so on, straight along, in alphabetic consecutiveness. It would not have been so bad, either, supposing the compartments had taken this natural order

of letters in that other mode of down and then up again, vertically. But we found that neither of these methods was observed; that matters were arranged on very different principles. From which compartment could a letter most easily be reached?—that it was that determined precedence; followed by the other consideration of: Which are the letters most frequently required? A good deal, this, for a little Early Worker to have to master. It involved that he should know that if a typefounder were sending in a bill, or fount of type (pica), weighing five hundred pounds, there would have to be twelve thousand letter e's in it, and only two hundred letter z's; nine thousand t's, and only five hundred q's; eight thousand n's and eight thousand s's (they are in equal demand), and only three thousand m's; six thousand four hundred h's, and only one thousand seven hundred g's. It involves this, because, as that is the proportion in which letters are required, so it is the principle on which the compartments are filled. Thus, the centre of the case being the most ready to the hand, in the centre of the case does the most useful letter lie—e, this has been shown to be—and accordingly a large hillock of loose e's rises as sun or bull's-eye, whilst its satellites spread round—t and h (for the ever-recurring the) coming up to it by a kind of gambit from the left, like a knight's move at chess; and a n d, for and, crossing it by another gambit, under, beginning at the right hand. Then, beyond all this, there come full-stops, commas, semicolons, interjections, questions, quads (they are to make blanks at the end of fractions of lines, with the further intricacy as to width of em quads and en quads, and of whether they are one em, two em, or larger still), spaces, asterisks, hyphens, quotation-marks, to enumerate no more. Then come the facts that as four thousand five hundred commas are required to two thousand full-stops, that as a "space" is essential between every two words, and there has been many a volume put into type without a single asterisk being used in it at all, so choice of place is exercised over the arrangement of all these also, with Early Workers obliged to be quite intimate with every one. And then come the additional and crushing facts that when all this has been mastered respecting the unequal-sized compartments of the lower-case, it has all to be departed from and thrown aside in dealing with the case called "upper," since that is devoted to

caps. and figs. (i.e., capitals and figures), and since these are wanted pretty much in equal quantities, are arranged in near rotation, and have their compartments, therefore, chequered off pretty equally alike. Truly, it was not surprising that Early Workers stood somewhat spell-bound at composing, working at it with aspects serious and solemn, and even as much as sombre!

"There are all the different shapes and sizes of letters also," said our master-printer; and there, indeed, they were under the hand of an Early Worker, in the shape of a large broadside, or wall-poster, being quickly executed. This had letters as long as the little compositor's young fingers, letters no larger than his nail, letters in skeleton, letters globose with bulginess and fat; letters so small and timid they shrank out of sight; letters bigger again, that stood square and shouldering on solid stumps; letters shorn of any feet or stumps whatever, being mere uncivilised hoops, and hooks, and forks, and signposts; letters, indeed, that differed from each other in character and consequence in almost every line. "And all these and others, do these little people get to know them every one?"

There were so many shapes and sizes of letters—properly, founts or types—taking the whole business of composing from beginning to end, that they would want very much more knowing than an Early Worker would ever have time for, and very much more experience than an Early Worker would be likely to acquire under one roof-top. Printing exists with three grand and broad divisions to it: first, the business carried on in an establishment known as a Book House; next, the business carried on by a News House; lastly, that carried on by a Job House. Naturally one workman keeps to one broad division, since his faculties have been developed in the direction of it; and he is worth more, and can make more money, whilst engaged there. And these Early Workers under inspection, being in a Job House—by which is meant an office where they execute handbills, trade-lists, catalogues, circulars, specifications, billheads, pamphlets, and so on—would have as thorough an acquaintance with founts in all their infinite and ever-growing variety, as they would be likely to obtain anywhere, and as would certainly enable them, when Early Working was done, to follow their trade efficiently.

"Good! So, this little fellow, for

instance; how is it with him? Does he know the name of the type he is putting into words now?"

"What do you say, boy? Can you tell me what this is called?"

The boy could.

"Say it, then; go on."

"It's pica."

"Well, and this?"

"Nonpareil" (compositish for nonpareil).

"And this, lower down?"

The boy had to look a moment, this time, before answering.

"New long primmer" (spelt primer) was his answer, when the moment was over; and that was right.

It further transpired, after some painstaking consideration and comparison, that the technical term for the type at this moment under the reader's eye is long primer itself; that the running-heads—alias the title at the top of the columns, and continuing all through—are in long primer capitals; and that the date in the little letters, insinuated in the top corner, is the high-sounding nonpareil. Other odd names of types were read off from a list, as expanded skeleton, condensed antique, condensed Roman, bourgeois, Tuscan—the type whose capitals seem tightly tied in at the waist, for effeminacy and shapeliness—ruby, pearl, diamond. One more, lean Roman, called up a vision entirely to itself. Were not Cassius and Caius Ligarius lean Romans?

Caius Ligarius,

Cæsar was ne'er so much your enemy
As that same ague which hath made you lean.

Let me have men about me that are fat;
Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep o' nights;
Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look.

And another Roman presents himself, whilst this queer christening of the type causes momentary digression from the Early Workers so seriously setting it up. The French do not use the term pica—which is pure Latin for magpie—they call it cicero. The type next in size, known as small pica, is, in French, cicero approché, or cicero à petit ceil (cicero being a masculine form in Latin, as it happens, of cicera, a kind of pulse or bean). A further peculiarity is that the type pearl is known to the French compositors as mignonne; and to this it shall be added, just as a parenthesis, that the Germans have a graphic name for the signs () by which a parenthesis is known: they call them geese's eyes.

"And now, this very little bit of an Early Worker over here alone; this

solid-headed little chap, who cannot be above eight years old; can he do anything?"

"Put the question straight; he'll answer."

"Well, what is it, mannie? What are you about, eh?"

"I'm sorting pie."

This Early Worker had, we now perceived, a small heap of leaden letters under his unaccustomed—and well-nigh as leaden—fingers; and the poor little chap was taking one leaden letter from the heap, in a leaden manner, and one letter, and one, and one again; and was forming them into smaller leaden heaps, sedulously kept apart.

That, then, was sorting pie. Pie might be supposed to be corrupted from pica, or to be short for magpie direct and straight; at any rate, it meant letters—type; and let there be ever such a short day's work done by Early Workers at composing—or by older hands—letters will be sure to slip themselves out of "chases" and cases, will be sure to be left littering upon imposing-surfaces and on "bulks," will be sure, to get scattered about upon the floor; and when these have all been swept up together into some receptacle, it is essential they should be put back into their sorts again; it is essential, in other words, that they should get their sorting.

"Well, and when this is done, little man, what is it then?"

"Then"—with the same solemnity, the same leaden-moving fingers, the same grave eyes and serious sound—"after dis here is sorted, I have to sort more."

Solid young Early Worker! To which, let this much be added, with regard to the manipulation of pica-pie, whether in Latin form or English, it is not the pie that comes up to Early Workers' tastes; they hate it; consequently (or, perhaps, because), the sorting of it is given as mild punishment, to expiate, in a manner, petty breaches of composing discipline.

"Well"—to another little man, of another sort and size, at another stand—"what is it called that you are doing?"

"Dissing."

He could not have heard. At best, he could not have understood. If anyone were "dissing," it was surely that other and substantial little fellow just past, with his "dis" here and his "dis" there, that told how young and unformed his

speech was in him. But explanation was ready. To "dis" was short for to "distribute;" to distribute was to take type to pieces, after printing from, and to put all the pieces carefully away; so this little Early Worker was distributing, and thereby doing a proper piece of composing-duty that all, old or young, compositors must be prepared to undertake. Right enough; yet was it not very much the same after all as sorting pie? To be sure, it was curiously like it; a twin occupation, wholesale instead of retail, with only this deep-cut difference, that "dissing" must be done—and forthwith, or want of sufficient hundredweights of type would prevent composing being proceeded with at all; and that sorting pie may be done—being in such small quantities—either now, or in a month, or in a quarter; with the inevitable result that as it is a thing wherein evasion is possible, evasion wins, and the doing is left for an elementary labour, or for a fine. Distributing, however, contains much more than the mere putting back of c's amongst c's, and d's amongst d's, and so on, according to nonpareil-ship, ruby-hood, and the like, as is the absolute beginning and end of pie-sorting. Distributing commences at the far-away point where the printing-press, or the stereotyping process, dismisses the massive tablets of type as done with, and decrees that they need no longer be stored up for re-usage. These type-tablets—which have all along looked like chipped old slates in battered old frames, into which a thousand school-imps have scooped their small initials, scooping them upside down, of course—must at this point be submitted to rigid washing. This is done, because printing, omitting any allusion to stereotyping, leaves behind it flourishing settlements of viscous ink, deep down in "shank," and "seriffs," and "beard;" and because, if the rinsing or washing be left undone, or be done inefficiently, the letters "bake," i.e. will dry together, and stick so hard and fast, that the compositor has to knock them against his case to part them. The washing over, the Early Worker must raise his type-tablet (technically, his "forme") on to a flat surface, and must get it "unlocked." He takes his mallet and shooting-stick—the latter being an implement that, in a trade where talk is serious and dictionary meanings are attended to, would be called a large iron nail or spike—and hitting the mallet down upon the spike with as much strength as he possesses, his

work is to knock out the little oblong pieces of wood known as quoins. The use of these has been to wedge in firmly the side-sticks and foot-sticks surrounding the type, keeping them accurately in the centre of the chase, and leaving no chance for spot or stroke, letter or blank, to become contumacious and "fall out;" and when these have felt the hit of the shooting-stick and the blow of the mallet that has given it aim, and have yielded to it and shot away, therein is all that is necessary, and the unlocking is completed. The Early Worker finds his type loose after this; he can take it up line by line; he can pick out reglet and "quad," and letter and space, and hyphen and "fig." and full-stop and comma, with the greatest rapidity, and he can put back each tiny item into its allotted compartment as rapidly as he can touch. A thousand letters in an hour—about seventeen in a minute—is the rate at which a boy is expected to set up type, that is, to make it into words; he is quicker still over pulling words to pieces, and the subsequent "dissing," since all characters are standing the right way up in type that is fresh unlocked, which shows the "sort" of them immediately, and since there is no need to be particular as to which way characters fall when they are being thrown—or distributed—into their compartments, ready to be used again. And, as this is so, if a letter occasionally gets wrongly thrown in, and in due time gets wrongly set up, in place of one of the sort among which it has been found, can there not be understanding of the wrong, and a right forgiveness? Besides, whatever error an Early Worker at composing makes, an Early Worker at composing has to unmake, when his work has been through the press for proof of it, and the errors glare themselves into recognition. Back to him his forme is brought, the sheet that has been printed from it being brought back with it, and, after "reading," straightway correcting has to be effected. An Early Worker chancing to be about this very business, not far from the standing-place of the little "dissers," his labours afforded an apt illustration. This boy had the struck-off page in front of him, its wrong work scored through admonitorily in rich red lines; had the battered old chase quite close up, for correcting to be easily done to it, without stretch of hand; the boy had the page placed readably, in proper orthodox

mode and manner, down-strokes and tails downwards, number—legible and isolated—at the head, and there was interest in examining the type to see with what readiness errors could be detected. The result was, they could get no detection at all. The place, even, of them evaded discovery. Fractions of lines at the ends of sentences in the page were looked for, in the shape of fractions of lines to match in the type, to act as starting-points to find the particular sentence from which the wrong word was to be drawn out; but fractions of lines in the type were not present in the same positions and order—had no feint of correspondence.

"How can you find it?" was asked, with some of the sting of bafflement. "What is it by which you tell?" The aggravation being that the young Early Worker had his little fingers nimbly scuttling a hole out of the middle of the leaden puzzle, had his little fingers just as nimbly at work the next moment in filling the hole up, everything seeming mere day-by-day routine to him, as easy-going as habit.

"See the line, I do," answered the boy, simply; "see the page;" the simple commonplaceness of facts sitting upon him sadly, and stirring him up to no interest in demeanour.

Stirring him up to no elucidation either, as far as regards his words. This came unconsciously. Whilst he was yet speaking—sadly, as all through—pointing to the line, and pointing to the page; and the number lay at the foot, the foot lay at the head, the up was down, the down was up, the sentences ran topsy-turvy, the ends were beginnings, the beginnings were ends, bringing all blanks and spaces—and all brain-senses included—exactly contrary.

Things were not righted, either, when the young workman was asked if his work would "rise."

"Rise, now!" And coming after baking, and pie, and batter—of which something was said just now sideways—and coming after a further sideways allusion a little while before to a dripping-pan! There never could be poor Early Workers, in any other place, surrounded by such tantalising namings!

For all that, "to rise" was a very mechanical and necessary ceremony. It could be called "to lift," if that were preferred; and sometimes was (as though it were any more sane to ask if a

square foot or so of leaden letters could lift!); and the question simply meant, were the letters locked up tight enough in the chase, for the forme to be carried away without any of the letters tumbling out? It is a question an adult compositor, in an adult composing-room, puts to himself intently; for it is at his own cost (when on piecework), if, when he takes up his forme, his work falls to pieces. He has to distribute the pie and to recompose the matter, and can make no charge for so doing. To which there may be added here incidentally, that, if a workman writes down in his bill more hours' work than he ought to have written, all such excessive charge is called "horse." Then, as to batter, that could be very innocently explained. It came when letters, after "locking up," became injured by some tiny object being dropped upon them, and the tiny object being dented tight in through the dead squeezing of the press. When the impression of such letters lay upon the paper they had no shape for reading, only a smear; and there the "batter" was. Reverting to the dripping-pan, it was exactly what might be thought—a tinned iron pan, the whole length of a printing-press, to catch the oil perpetually running off.

After gravely taking in this information, attention was fixed on the little corrector, who, it was observed, stuck all his new words, as soon as he had set them up, into his mouth, whence he could extract them instantly when their locus had been prepared, and he was ready to pop them in. But no sense of the humour of this was with the young Early Worker. This was ascertained to a certainty when, on locking and unlocking his chases, his little quoins, or wedges (shooting out sometimes too rapidly, at others being wickedly hard to be shot in), were noticed to be nearly like the handy two-inch neat and oblong wooden batlings in a child's box of bricks.

"So," we suggested, influenced, no doubt, by the child-like surroundings, "you can play with these, sometimes, eh? Do you ever build these up, in play hours, into bridges, and churches, and castles?"

This was a puzzler for our little friend.

"Church?" he said slowly, quite adrift; "castle?"

For familiarity with his material had brought him its precise measurement and value. At work upon quoins, his quoins

remained quoins, and suggested nothing else to his imagination.

"You can't do nothing with them," he arrived at at last, when the idea had been grasped, and he sank back to work; "they're sick at one end; they're fin at the other. You can't do nothing—see."

As if a happy child of wholesome breeding would not have made the very "sickness" and "finness" the means of something, and would not have made that something on the spot! But this little Early Worker and the other little Early Workers at composing with him, belonged not to the band of happy children of wholesome breeding. They were under safe shelter when their poor, coarse hands were seen busy at composition, when their poor seriousness and solemnity seemed worked and woven in as a portion of their calling, for they were in an Industrial School,* in a large and lofty building, with plenty of light to cheer them, plenty of air to breathe, and with the good accessories of excellent instruction, and cleanliness, and discipline. Morally and physically the mantle of sunshine and peace had fallen upon them; they were in a haven where all their absolute wants were being attended to, and where no harm could come. These children—although, by parentage, by bad inheritance, by impure example, tenants, many of them, of the hideous republic of crime, and want, and laziness, and violence—had been snatched out of that black seam or stratum that is knitted well-nigh inextricably in and out every fair kingdom of better things, and that generous philanthropists are striving to battle with hard and fast. No child-life had been theirs, in its happy sense. They were allowed now the coveted distinction of good-conduct stripes for special services of integrity, and the childish luxury of small pocket-money for extra application to labour; they were fed, clothed, lodged (although with some rigour, absolutely indispensable to counteract old vicious habits of vagrancy, theft, deceit); they were taught school-skill in addition to the trade-skill by which in the future they could earn their bread. But in the outer world they had known blows, and oaths, and squalor, and starvation (one, as an actual fact, had been picked up off a dust-heap, gnawing a castaway bone); and was this good nursery-ground for childhood's ever-varying expedients and imagination?

* St. Paul's, Burdett Road.

The sense of this came quickly. The knowledge of the deep significance of it could not be cast out, and it brought the widest pity. Yet the little compositors were to be left now; it would be well if some little gleam of a smile could be obtained by way of a light good-bye, and as there was one point, among many, that had not been put, it was tried.

"Now," we asked, "in any talking of composition and compositors, something is said of 'fat.' Do you know it?"

The boy woke up. It was quite evident he did know all about it.

"Well?"

"It's when——"

"Well, go on."

"It's when there's plenty of short pages, plenty of space between the lines, and plenty of short lines."

"And do you call it fat because it's nice to do?"

The boy nodded.

"So," with the action pleasantly comprehended, and the question put to the master for corroboration, "compositors prefer blank spaces to words, and short lines to full-length ones?"

"They do."

"And in the trade generally? Not only with the Early Workers?"

"In the whole trade; everywhere."

"Making short talk makes fat then; and this little bit of question and answer, if it were put into type at once, would be a very nice piece of fat indeed?"

"Yes."

"Yes?"

"Yes."

To which there may be put the fact that, by strict printing rule, no "copy" should be selected by compositors; they would be sure to choose pages containing plenty of "breaks." It should be dealt out fairly, so much and so much, just as it comes. Fat, then, has an equal chance of being received by all. There is, of course, a reverse to copy that is fat; the name of it is "lean," otherwise a "solid dig." It cannot be said that printers' language is not expressive.

BY THE RIVERSIDE.

BEER BELOW BRIDGE.

"YES, sir. This old house is just as it always was, barring that we never set out the waterside room now. There it is, still holding together, the room is, but the company is gone long ago. Times are

altered at Lime'us, I can tell you. Years ago people used to come here, to enjoy their pint and pipe and look at the steamboats. But you can see steamboats almost anywhere now. Yes; it is a fine view for them as likes the waterside. You can see a'most from London-bridge on your right down to Greenwich on your left."

Mine host of the Waterman's Arms, Limehouse, is in the right. From the rickety wooden gallery where he holds forth to me, I make out that the famous old tavern is pitched, as it were, in the elbow formed by the Thames between the Tower and Deptford. The dark waters of the Pool are just now tipped with silver and the wavelets glitter like the scales of some great serpent between black masses of shipping, ever and anon assuming weird unearthly shapes, as of the ghosts of bygone vessels returned for the nonce from Davy Jones's safe keeping. Tall chimneys rear their gaunt forms against the pale sky, cold and smokeless, the ghostly monuments of departed prosperity, the skeletons of dead industries. Over all there is a great silence. Not the plash of an oar is heard at the river-front of the ancient inn with the water-gate to it; the only sign of human life being the red light of the screw-steamer stealing noiselessly down on the Surrey side. On the landside of the Waterman's Arms there is a fair trade doing and much excellent ale consumed, but the part whence I look upon the broad silent river shimmering in the moonlight is never visited by chance custom. It is one of the last representatives of a class of taverns now rapidly passing away. As the waterside custom has departed, and the business on the landside become all important, the old houses have been gradually rebuilt—on the plan of a modern gin-palace—the picturesque galleries and waterside rooms disappearing entirely. One by one the green-painted bulging water-fronts vanish, and every sign of the old waterside traffic is obliterated. Even the few which now remain are left to the rats, and the stairs running down to the water are slowly rotting away, and dropping piecemeal into the ooze and slime. In the old days when the silent highway was the great thoroughfare, and the Thames police were not so busy as the crimps, and press-gangs, and smugglers, these water-gates were useful for a variety of purposes, and, until the recent wholesale demolition set in, the

features of the whole riverside inns were well worthy of study. The Anchor and Hope, amply furnished with rooms bulging out over the river, yet preserved the steps down which thousands of passengers swarmed to the Gravesend boats, and treasured the memory of subterranean passages and chambers where the press-gangs concealed their victims, until they were shipped on to the night-boats. The Prospect of Whitby is another place with a history. About it clings an aroma of tobacco and Schiedam, Nantz and negro-head, which paid no dues to the Crown. Here again were subterranean passages and snug hiding-places for riverside Will Watch, and many a stroke of business was done over a pipe and a bowl of punch brewed from right Jamaica. The Old Pewter Platter long enjoyed an amphibious existence, but for many years past has lost that character, the river having retired and left it high and dry. This is a place notorious in local legend. Queer tales of the uses to which the trap-doors once overhanging the water were put are common in the neighbourhood, and a labyrinth of disused and choked-up passages stamp it as the scene of strange and secret deeds. The David and Harp, like many of these old waterside houses, has undergone a process of renovation, like that which has swept away the great green galleries and projecting rooms of the Gun at Blackwall, and left in their stead clean and wholesome but unpicturesque brickwork. But the Waterman's Arms is yet untouched, and presents the most perfect type of the riverside tavern now extant. Relics of bygone splendour may yet be found within its ancient walls, although the paintings have long since faded out; and the fireplace, big enough to roast a baron of beef, has not seen the preparations of a great feast within the memory of man. Mine host—straw-hatted and generally nautical as to his make-up—drops into the ancient settle in the ingle-nook, as I stray out once more and let weird fancies crowd upon me. What stories of hearty mirth and of strong-handed evil-doing could these old panelled walls relate; what records of wrong and trickery, what tales of rage and fear and bitter tears! Readers of the long roll of England's naval glory and the triumphantly successful career of the Great Republic of the West rarely pause to think of the cost of these achievements to the poor if not lowly; but they may be read in the novels, the dramas, and

the popular songs of the last century, when crimping was a profitable business.

To these aquatic taverns were dragged helplessly drunken or drugged victims, to awake on board a ship laden with the sweepings of gaols, to provide labour for the king's plantations in Maryland, Virginia, and the West Indies. Help or redress there was none—the only law being that of the handspike and rope's-end. We read with horror of lettres de cachet and oubliettes, without giving a thought to the thousands of free Englishmen, who were kidnapped and shipped for the plantations in the good old time. More glorious, but little less hard, was the fate of those captured by the press-gangs, for ever prowling by the waterside during the great war, when a thwack on the head with a stick was the prelude to an enforced service of years. When the king's ships wanted men, law and justice were set aside, and poor Jack was torn from home and kindred, half smothered in a cellar at Limehouse, and then quietly shipped off to wear away the soreness of his heart in fighting the "Johnny Crapaws." Less saddening are the records of smuggling, for the mind of man has ever failed to thoroughly appreciate the heinousness of cheating the revenue; and there was a species of free and sporting air about smuggling, which caused it to be regarded, even by steady-going, God-fearing men, in much the same light that a Wessex peasant looks upon poaching. It was a thing to be proud of, to write songs about, and included the consumption of a vast quantity of strong drink—an important consideration to the genuine old salt. Under the dark shadows of the long lines of shipping, boats with muffled oars crept silently to the old waterside tavern, and slunk under the projecting rooms into which the goods were hoisted through trap-doors, equally convenient for receiving them, or disposing of the victim of a sudden brawl; while from the great rooms above, and the leads in summer time, arose the sound of coarse revelry, snatches of sea-songs, and others less innocent in character, rough jest, and rougher repartee, the whole studded with a wealth of strange oaths. All this rough, breezy, not altogether unmanly, or un-English life, has passed away as utterly as Captain Dangerous himself, and I stand on the gallery of the Waterman's Arms gazing on the magnificent moonlit scene, as completely alone as if the old wooden structure I

occupy had never rung with laughter, or reeked with the fumes of punch and tobacco. Groping my way through a dusky room, I see long-shore men drinking modest beer at the bar, and wander into the street, to find that the once notorious Globe and Pigeon is turned into a coffee-shop, and Tom King's old haunt metamorphosed into a gin-palace.

It is a change from the silent riverside to noisy Salmon's-row, glaring with gas-light and alive with the clatter of Saturday night's market. Whatever may be said of the poverty of a portion of the East-end, there appears to be money under the shadow of Limehouse Church. The butchers are doing a roaring trade, but are doing it cautiously, with a screen of wooden lattice-work to protect their meat from the hand of the spoiler. A brisk business, too, is doing in old clothes, in fried fish, and in dried haddocks. The latter reminds me that I have promised to visit a "smoker," whose acquaintance I made at Billingsgate one cold November morning, when he astonished me by the quantity of fish he bought and paid for. A short stroll down "Donkey-row" brings me to the home of the genuine town-made "Finnan haddie" of commerce. There is nothing Scottish about the dwelling of the smoker—a slight odour of whisky being almost lost in the aroma of the smoke-house. His house is unambitious in appearance, being in fact but one storey high—but he has plenty of space behind for his smoke-house—admirably arranged, and scrupulously clean. It is a series of wooden chimneys, with fires burning at their base, and furnished with ledges, on which rest the cross-sticks strung with fish. My smoker is an artist, as well as a man of business. He is aware that the large-sized haddock is not prized by the connoisseur, who knows that it is not the genuine Finnan article; and therefore gives extraordinary care to the preparation of the smaller specimens, which, when sufficiently smoked, bear the stamp of authenticity. He cures them to perfection, and his fish find their way—I could tell how, but that I have the fear of libel before my eyes—into the market as real "Finnan haddies." Having been brought up in a serious family, where I was taught to speak the truth at all hazards, I venture a slight remonstrance on hearing of this palpable deceit; but my host disposes of my scruples by the assertion that, first, the lie is not a lie, being "in the way of business," and

then proceeds to declare that fish cured by him are every bit as good as—in fact, rather better than—those cured in Scotland; clinching his argument by offering to bet me a "fiver"—he has plenty of "fivers" in his greasy pocket—that I cannot tell one from the other. I retire from his challenge by the poor, evasive remark that he is a sporting character, and I am not, and I am then entrusted with the sorrow of his life—the decadence and final extinction of the prize-ring. "Pigeons is pleasure," he remarks, "and dawgs is delightful, and cock-fightin' ain't bad; but give me a genuine good mill down the river, and I'm as jolly as a sand-boy." Hoping to make the acquaintance of a sand-boy some day, and thus be enabled to judge of the unparalleled pitch of hilarity attainable by that favoured individual, I deprecate reference to the prize-ring, and turn the subject to fish-curing. "I will take you round to see a pal," continues my smoker. "You have just paid a visit to Finnan. I will take you to Yarmouth and to Newfoundland." Completely taken down, I trudge out into Donkey-row again, and follow my conductor through a labyrinth of narrow streets, till we arrive at our destination. The "pal" is not a haddock but a herring smoker, and is prepared to lay six to four on his fish against any cured in Yarmouth. He buys them at Billingsgate, and sells them—I may not say to whom, but they are eaten by gourmands as the peculiar product of Yarmouth. This "pal" is a great economist, and is careful to catch in tin trays every drop of oil that exudes from the luscious herring in the process of smoking. This he stores until he has several barrels of it, and then finds for it a mysterious market. "What is done with it?" I ask, naturally enough. "I don't want to know," he answers—"but I think; well, I know—that it is made into cod-liver oil. You may or may not know that we do clever things at the East-end. We make butter here by the ton without the cow; but that is nothing. I was sold once myself. I drove the missis out to Epping, and thought it would be good business to bring home some sausages. It was a long time before I could find the shop, and then they told me I could not have any sausages, for the cart had not yet come down from Chiswell-street."

Wandering out of the genuine Yarmouth atmosphere, we proceed to refresh the inner man at the Walnut Tree, an

hostelry held in great esteem in the East-end for the quality of its beer and the ghastriness of its associations. To a certain order of mind, not—as the female audience at the trial of Wainwright bore witness—by any means confined to the poor and ignorant, the atmosphere of crime is particularly agreeable. Bright, wholesome beer drunk over the bar at the Walnut Tree is pleasant no doubt, but the true local zest can only be enjoyed in the taproom—religiously preserved with the original fireplace and settles, just as it was on the day when a startled servant, looking into the bench-box used as a coal-scuttle, discovered the head of Greenacre's unhappy paramour. There is revelry of the noisy, market kind at the Walnut Tree. One known as "Whipper" is the centre of fun. Every rag on Whipper's wiry body jumps for joy. His coat is split up the back, his pantaloons are in an awesome condition. He is begrimed with dirt and bedizened with knots of ribbon, which inadequately bring his tattered garments on terms with each other. Whipper is not of any particular profession, having been from his youth upward of a cheerful tone of mind averse from regular employment. His feet are apt to a breakdown, and his hands naturally fall into a scientific attitude. Yet Whipper is, I am told, of respectable family—a farmer's son, but the black sheep of the homestead, the enfant terrible of the little Essex village where he was born. Whipper, like most little men, is pugnacious. He is ready to fight on the slightest provocation, and passes his life in rough-and-tumble encounters, which to him constitute the salt of existence. Like men of loftier station, he is the representative of the principle of reaction, which brings the sons and grandsons of successful men down again to the ranks. We all know his analogues in other circles of society—the heir to a coronet who cannot keep his hands from stamped paper, and the earl's son who cannot write his own name upon it, but sportively signs that of the wealthy peer at whose house he is staying on a visit; the son of the gallant soldier, who, after years of impunity, is discovered cheating at cards, and is hurled out of society into the nebulous borderland of divorced women and ostracised men; and the children of the successful "navvy," ultimately developed into a great contractor, who drink themselves into the grave as their grandfather did before them. Instances of this persistent

downward tendency are easy to multiply. Scores of "frightful examples" may be found at Boulogne, at Jersey, at the inland watering-places of the Continent, in the dull towns of Belgium, in the gold-fields of California and Australia, in the diamond-fields of Africa, and in the slums of London. All moral sense is long since gone, but there is yet in the red-nosed, glassy-eyed tatterdemalion something—perhaps it is his voice, despite its huskiness—which plainly tells that once he lived amid widely different surroundings. Whipper is as one of these. He loves to sing the old country ditty, "The King cannot swagger, nor get drunk like a beggar, nor be half so happy as I"—a statement hardly accurate, at least, in its initial proposition. He is to all appearances happy enough, and is perhaps somewhat unfairly classed with many of those just enumerated, for he is honest enough. He is only hopelessly idle and afflicted with an insatiable desire for beer, which, acting on the Whipperian constitution like fighting rum upon that of the New York loafer, occasionally introduces him to the interior of a station-house.

Not being very far from Bluegate-fields, newly christened Victoria-street, I elect to pay a visit to an old friend, who prefers the intoxication of opium to that of beer. Johnson, as my Chinese friend is called, is no cleaner than of yore—his stairs are as grimy, and the atmosphere of his den is as stifling, as ever; but there is now about his habitation a tone of unreality, as of a show-place, with a few Chinamen playing the part of opium-smokers, and Johnson on the look-out to show the trick of opium-smoking and take the half-crowns bestowed by his numerous visitors. Probably, when Johnson of the oddly-humorous countenance was first discovered, he was the genuine keeper of an opium tavern, and made his living out of his pig-tailed compatriots by selling opium, as the landlord of the Waterman's Arms sells beer. But since he has become known, not to say celebrated, and spruce young dandies oft make up a party to start from a West-end club and "do" the East-end, Mr. Johnson has, I take it, learned to prize his visitors more, and his legitimate customers less. No doubt he has made money, although, with the "peculiarity" of his race pointed out by Mr. Bret Harte, he keeps all his surroundings as squalid as ever. His customers, or "stool pigeons," are more difficult to keep in, or rather out

of condition. They have none of the weird ghastliness proper to the opium-smoker. That fat Chinaman in the corner, whose hide shines with the lustre of bronze, is, I would go bail, a much greater consumer of heavy-wet than of the juice of the poppy. And these lads, laughing till their eyes sparkle again as they catch the familiar sounds, "gin" and "beer," are assuredly not given to narcotics. They are playing a mysterious game with shirt-buttons, which I solicit Johnson to explain; but that gay deceiver flies off at once into such a wildly incoherent description, that I give him up in despair. As I walk down the creaking stairs, I feel that I am the poorer by one illusion. Yet there is hope. I will look up the Lascar opium-den, where business was wont to be brisk. It is some time before my knock is answered, and then I find that there is no business doing, and that the house is to be thoroughly cleansed, and made decently habitable. Great heaven, it was time! but I own that I do not quite understand how it is to be done. I may be an unjust and prejudiced occidental, but I hold the opinion that, after a house has been inhabited for any length of time by orientals, only one thing remains to be done with it, and that is, to apply petroleum and lucifer matches in a manner likely to bring the apostle of purification into the dock of the Old Bailey.

From the opium-dens to the Greek wine-shop in Ratcliff-highway is not a very long walk, but a score of years ago it was likely to prove adventurous. It is not attended with any very great risk now, for the police have got a tight hand on the worst part of the Eastern population, and Jack, whether English or foreign, is mending his manners as rapidly as any other working-man. Sailors' homes are gradually rescuing him from the clutches of the crimp, and tea and bread and butter are taking the place of rum and tobacco. There are dull times in the Highway just now, and the wine imported by our Greek acquaintance remains longer in the barrel perched on his counter than he cares for. There is wailing too at Paddy's Goose over the jolly old times now gone by, and a cry of Ichabod arises from the Mahogany Bar. Perhaps these resorts have suffered from the competition of the recently opened music-hall in the Mile-end-road, an enormous place built over a garden, where order is kept, at least as severely as in similar places of amusement farther west.

As Lusby's pours out its thousands into the broad thoroughfare, I observe that business is going briskly on in every direction; and, after a tankard at the Blind Beggar of Bethnal-green, transfer my person from the far East to a haunt in the far West, where I can indulge my modest taste, by wearing a green velvet coat and a pink necktie, without exciting the horror that such an apparition would produce in Clubland proper.

A MINE OF WEALTH.

"JACK!" shouted my worthy brother Dick, bursting into my chambers in the classic precincts of Pump-court, and waking me out of my beauty sleep at ten o'clock in the morning—"Jack, I am going to make both our fortunes at last!"

"Go to—ugh!" I replied, and pulled the blankets over my ears again, not even caring to particularise the precise direction of Dick's intended destination. Poor Dick! He had made my fortune half-a-dozen times before, and the net result had not been of a nature to induce the sacrifice of any part of a night's rest in anticipation of the seventh.

"No, but really, old man, it's the straight tip this time, and no mistake. Look here. You're a dramatic critic?"

"Which," I replied, with feeble sarcasm, "is why you rouse me up in the middle of the night, after writing a column and a half about a four hours' monument of imbecility, which wasn't over till past twelve?"

"Never mind, old fellow. Look here. You know what asses managers are?"

"You don't mean to say one of them has accepted——"

"Get out. No. I don't. But I was introduced last night to old What's-his-name—you know—manager of the Thingumbob, and he has given me the run of all his MSS., and promised me half profits from anything good I can find. Meant it for chaff, you know, the old humbug. But I knew better. We'll go into 'em together this blessed day, and you shall have half. It's a mine of wealth, old fellow, that's what it is. A mine of wealth."

Poor Dick! I hadn't the heart to refuse him, and he really does want his fortune making badly. Besides, I was awake now, broad enough, and it would probably in the end take less time to wade through the mighty brown-paper parcel he had

lugged into the room, and thumped down with a crash upon my ricketiest table, than to convince him—or induce him to depart unconvinced—in any other way.

"Look here, old fellow!" is his one unanswerable argument. "There must be some good plays written."

"Must there?" I answer doubtfully. "I don't know that."

"Of course there must. And you know what rubbish is brought out."

How can I reply, but with a groan? I do know that.

"Well then," is his triumphant answer, "where can all the good ones be? Why here, of course." And Dick slaps his hand on the big brown-paper parcel joyfully and hopefully. So, registering a mental vow to take it out of Mr. What's-his-name of the Thingumbob—whoever he might eventually prove to be—in regard to the very next piece he might be rash enough to submit to my outraged judgment, I surrender; order in brandies and sodas, and prepare to dig my way into poor Dick's mine of wealth. Let me at starting assure my readers that the literary treasures at whose disinterment they are about to assist, were verily the real, actual, and entire contents of the MS. chest of one of our leading London theatres, and that the account here given is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, concerning them, the extracts given in all cases verbatim, literatim, et punctuatim.

The first piece that comes to hand is big enough, at all events. It is closely written too, in a small hand, not particularly legible, and even sanguine Dick can protest but feebly against my suggestion of weighing it in the scales of common life, before submitting it to those of criticism. It proves to be a little under half a stone, or about the weight of fifty copies of an ordinary daily paper; and as a diligent search of some minutes fails in bringing to light any scene in which more than two characters are introduced at a time, and as even Dick does not see his way to any startling success for a duologue, let us say three or four nights long, we put our ponderous friend on one side, and drive the shaft a little farther down the mine.

"Can't be all nuggets, you know," says Dick, cheerily, and seizes upon another goodly volume in its business-like brown-paper wrapper. Largely and clearly written this one, with all the honours of red ink for its stage directions, which are numerous and explicit. On the whole,

perhaps, rather more explicit than practicable. Here, for instance, is the first passage at which the MS. happens to open:

VALERIA. See yonder dark-eyed girl. She loves your slave.

[VALERIA appears to lose her love for ESCA suddenly, through jealousy.

A little farther on, this fair rival of our old friend, Lord Burleigh, is called upon to perform a less elevated but equally difficult feat, being instructed, while standing at the sideboard with the tribune, to "pass her arm over his shoulder and change the position of a goblet," into which that worthy has been secretly pouring poison. A little farther on we have the Roman amphitheatre, with the famous combat of net and trident carried out by the principal actors in all its details to the bitter end. In short the play is, as we find on turning to the title-page, a faithful transcript of Whyte-Melville's Gladiators, "adapted" to the stage with all that simplicity of treatment in the way of turning description into stage direction, and all that touching confidence in the boundlessness of stage room, and in the resources of scenery, effects, and so forth, which are ever so pleasing a characteristic of this phase of amateur dramatic art. Recalling to mind the story and its catastrophe, I turn to the last scene for Valeria's death, which is in this wise:

ESCA. Mariamne, dearest, there is a sword if thou canst only reach it.

[MARIAMNE tries, but is repulsed by the smoke. VALERIA now comes on, followed by LICINIUS. As ELEAZAR sees her he hurls his spear at her, and then the whole barricade on which he is standing gives way, and he falls into the flames. As the spear strikes VALERIA she sinks down.

"Rough on Valeria," assents Dick, a trifle grimly. Then, plucking up again: "But, after all, we don't want adaptations, you know. It is the original dodge we're after." So Lady Valeria follows her bulky predecessor to the limbo of the window-seat, and Dick digs out another shovelful of ore. Something very "original" this time. Nothing less than our ancient friend the Flying Dutchman, newly adapted for the stage in very similar fashion to the last. "Confound it," says Dick, and sends the offending adaptation fluttering wildly to its way. Then, for the fourth time, he dives into the big parcel and brings up this time three brown-paper volumes, which on examination prove to be a faithful

translation of *Patrie*. "Confound it," says Dick again.

And now, for another half-hour or more, we plough our way with grim determination through a score or so of farces and comediettas. "Strictly original" some of them proclaim themselves, and there is on the whole not much reason to doubt the fact, for it is difficult to imagine the source from which they could have been stolen; and as each aspiring MS. finds its way, with a jerk, from the reader's hands to the fast-growing heap of condemned rubbish in the window-seat, the said reader looks up with a grunt and a shrug at his fellow-sufferer, half-way through another on the opposite side of the table, and receives a shrug and a growl in reply. Sweet little harmless things are most of the manuscripts, after all. Some hail from grave business addresses in the City; some from the fashionable precincts of Pall-mall; some from the high official quarter of Whitehall; some from the less distinguished Mile-end-road. One, about the best of them, is by a young lady down in Devonshire, and notwithstanding a score or so of fatal drawbacks in the way of multiplicity of scenes, obscurity of action, inadequacy of motive, and so forth, gives really fair promise of being the precursor, say half-a-dozen years hence, of something good. Another, one would say from a still younger lady, comes all the way from Glasgow, written in clear round-hand on sixteen pages of a small copy-book, and shows, in three scenes which would play something less than three minutes each, how clever Charlie Compton and his friends dressed themselves up like three fiends, and frightened hard-hearted old Jonathan into consenting to clever Charlie's marriage with the old miser's pretty daughter, with a fortune of at least three million pounds. A third discloses the domestic complications which arise in the household of a preaching citizen from the unprecedented and unsatisfiable demand for lodgings occasioned by the arrival in London of that unrivalled tragedian, Mr. B——y S——n. Several would really do rather nicely for very amateur theatricals of the extreme back drawing-room type. Two or three have an amount of dramatic capability—as might no doubt be predicted with equal certainty of about everything yet written, from the first book of Euclid to the last page of this year's Post-office Directory, which, in the hands of a popular low comedian, and with a

rather more than usually energetic exercise of his power of "development," might serve to "play the people out" efficiently enough. We come to the end of them at last, imbibe a fresh brandy and soda, and are thankful.

After this interval of repose we refresh ourselves further with a ballet, a little weak in its mythology, but elegantly illustrated with water-colour sketches of the principal scenes and characters. And so we work our way back to the serious business, Dick's hopes reviving as we light upon an Irish drama. And there is no denying that here and there, among the loose foolscap sheets upon which he pounces so eagerly, are signs of, at all events, some power of appreciating the dramatic features of preceding works. Nor is the play altogether devoid of originality. The incidents and characters, of course, are those with which we were tolerably familiar, even before the days of Mr. Boucicault; but some of the stage directions are new and naïf. "Here"—i.e., after a dozen pages or so of minute cross-examination—"here the jury interfere, saying they have quite made up their minds that O'Reilly had nothing to do with it, and further that Mr. Jones had not been fired at at all"—a truly Irish addendum—"and that it looked very like a conspiracy on the part of Darby O'Rourke. The court breaks up, Miles being discharged." Or again, "All start for the village of Jehageda, where there is a small roadside public-house. Father Murphy goes in and soon returns with a respectable peasant woman, widow Holahan."

We are getting very near the bottom of the mine now, and despite the soothing influence of the brandies and sodas, Dick's face is lengthening considerably. There are only five MSS. left, and the first of these is very brief, only thirty-four small copy-book pages not too closely written. It is not without originality either, of a kind. The thirty-four pages contain three acts and nine scenes, the last thirteen pages being devoted to a full-length trial, in the sheriff's court, of an action for damages for false imprisonment, the proceedings in the said action being, by some beneficent arrangement—no doubt specially provided for the trial of such cases in sheriff's courts—confined strictly to the speeches first of the plaintiff's counsel, which recapitulates the incidents as presented in the previous twenty-one pages, and then of

the judge, which recapitulates the speech of the counsel for the plaintiff. The case under such circumstances is, I need hardly say, so clear that the jury can not only dispense with the vulgar and time-wasting process of hearing evidence, but are able at once, without even calling upon the defendant's counsel for his version of the affair, to return at once a verdict for the plaintiff, with damages one thousand pounds. So the audience have some cause to congratulate themselves at all events. The next two pieces have nothing very special about them. They are simply, as Mr. Alfred Jingle said of the fourteen packing-cases which were coming down to Rochester by the smack, "heavy, heavy, d——d heavy." And now only two are left. Dick and I drink the last brandy and soda between us, toss up for the last cigar—which of course falls to him—and taking a MS. apiece prepare ourselves for the worst. Suddenly——

"By Jove!" I exclaim.

"By Jove!" thunders Dick, with the simultaneous fidelity of an Irish echo.

And then we lay our MSS. down and look at each other enquiringly.

"I've got it, Dick," say I at last.

"So have I, old man," and Dick slaps his broad hand down upon the MS. and nods solemnly.

"Verse, mine is, Dick!"

"So's mine, old man—blank!"

"By Jove!"

"By Jove!"

And then for a time there is a silence, broken only by the rustling of the quick-turning leaves, as each expectant critic devotes himself to the mastery of the particular work of art before him. My task is the first completed, and, as I lay the MS. aside, Dick looks up eagerly for my judgment.

"We were looking for something original, Dick," I observe solemnly, "and we have got it, at last. Listen; the piece is entitled *Androclus*, and it commences thus:

ACT I.

SCENE I.—An Assembly-room in *Cæsar's Palace*.

Enter *CÆSAR*, *ANDROCLUS*, *COUNTESS*, *Guards*.

CÆSAR. Hold thy tongue, vile wretch. Let us have no more of this prate, Or thou wilt fall and win my deadliest hate.

ANDROCLUS. Tyrant, I no more will hold my tongue, for now The evil spirit in me is let loose; Were I to keep it, I should be a goose.

CÆSAR.

Cease, cease, how durst thou?

[*Motions to the Guards.*]

Take him away, and in a dungeon deep

With chains the strongest bound, that haughty spirit may come round, And fall down at my feet.

[*Exit ANDROCLUS and Guards.*]

BLANCHE.

Oh, that I were a man!

"I don't quite know who *Blanche* is, by-the-way," I observe, as I turn to the next scene. "She does not appear in the *dramatis personæ*; and this is the only line she has to speak."

"Never mind," answers Dick. "The observation is a sound one; and a really fine actress, you know, can do a great deal even with a small part. Is the next scene as good?"

Quite. And in fine contrast. *Androclus* is in his dungeon, and soliloquiseeth:

Ah, well, this is the fate of all who to the tyrant will not bow,
And how to escape from this I don't know how.

As he speaks, however, he finds a hatchet, which *Cæsar*, it seems, has left there, and with which *Androclus* cuts his way through the bars of his dungeon-window. But now a terrible alternative is presented to him:

Hark! underneath the dark and slimy water rolls,
Shall I trust to that or walk upon the walls?
Ah, no! I'd rather be caught in the crocodile's jaws
Than ever again 'neath *Cæsar's* paws.

And, as he plunges, the guards enter, to lead the escaped captive to execution.

"This portion of the scene," I continue, dropping unconsciously into the familiar critical style, "is very happily and powerfully conceived. The coarse brutality of the first soldier—the rough straightforwardness with which he proclaims that:

We've come to launch thee in that little bark Eternity,
And for thee we have no mite of pity—

contrast finely with the more tigerish playfulness of the second, who mockingly suggests that:

Perhaps the bird hath flown on wings of love,
To the heavens above.

And finer still is the chilling effect upon these lower natures of the silence and darkness, which have only stirred the late captive to yet bolder efforts, as they shout:

Come forth, coward, and let us look upon thy face,
We want something to cheer us in this awful place;

and the utter despair which comes upon them as they discover that the bird is, indeed, flown, and rush headlong from the deserted dungeon, exclaiming:

Oh raging now will Cæsar be,
Oh dear-a-me, oh dear-a-me!

"The next act takes us to the forest, where Androclus performs the well-known surgical operation upon the lion, and where the lion himself is shortly after caught by the officers in search of Androclus, and carried off to Cæsar as some compensation for the missing slave. In due course, too, Androclus himself, weary of life now that his only friend has been taken from him, surrenders; and we are thus brought to the last grand scene in the amphitheatre. This occupies the whole of the third act, and, as this act is not only strikingly original, but almost equally brief, we give it—that is to say, Dick, I will read it to you, in extenso:

ACT III.

The Arena. CÆSAR, MANDANE, MEDEA, CELSUS, MALARUS, &c. CÆSAR rings a bell. Enter ANDROCLUS, guarded and in chains.

CÆSAR. Bring forth Androclus. Take off the chains, and give him his dearly-bought liberty. Androclus, thou shalt no longer be a slave.

But freely have that which thou wilt no longer crave.

If thou conquer this forest king
Thy life and liberty it will bring.

ANDROCLUS. What hast thou to say for thyself? Nothing have I to say, but that I am innocent of that which merits this.

CÆSAR. Haughty, proud, insulting slave,
Death awaits thee.

[Rings the bell. The lion comes bounding forth. ANDROCLUS springs forward, calling "Prince, Prince!" The lion lies down and licks his feet.]

ANDROCLUS. Cæsar, this is the only friend I have in the wide world. When he was ill I nursed him, and he doth but prove his gratitude, and unless thou consider to save him with myself, we will die together.

CÆSAR. Androclus, I have wronged thee, but now thou art free,

ANDROCLUS. And no longer shall I thy master be. To be the faithful servant of thy daughter is all I crave.

CÆSAR. So be it. Now for the marriage and the festival.

FINIS."

"Not so good as mine," said Dick, as I laid down the MS. and looked to him for the anticipated applause. "Mine's modern, too; domestic interest, you know, and all that sort of thing. I am not quite sure about the policeman—there's a virtuous policeman, you know, of a Johnsesque turn of mind, who, when a young woman thanks him for having rescued her from

self-destruction, tells her that it was 'his public duty to act as he did; but that, pleased as he is at all times to perform his public duty, he felt that, on that occasion, he was exercising also a private duty—nay, a deep and lasting feeling of gratitude.' You see, there is a sort of pre-conceived notion that a policeman ought always to be comic, and— Eh? Quite comic enough, you think, he'd be? Well, perhaps, he might. And now for the rest of the story. I won't read it all, because it's longer than the other; but it opens with a very touching scene between Mr. and Mrs. Glanreth. Mrs. G., you know, has painted a picture, which Mr. G., who is clearly a connoisseur, considers very fine indeed. 'The contour in all the figures,' he tells her, 'is easy, graceful, and flowing; the colouring is vivid, yet most harmonious; and, as a whole, it is indeed beautiful. That female figure, in a posture of devotion, is sublime!' The female party in question turns out to be Mrs. G.'s 'blessed mother;' and this was the modest petition she was uttering:

Gracious heaven,
Grant me the bliss of seeing my dear child
United to a husband whose honour
Is as lofty as his virtue is divine.

Mr. G., who is evidently as discreet in bearing as he is lofty in honour and divine in virtue, interposes here deprecatingly. But Mrs. G. will not have it, insisting that the little request has been 'most righteously fulfilled.' 'And I,' rejoins Mr. G., 'can only say, with bounding heart:

That in such blest fulfilment of her prayer
I've gained an angel of delight and love,
Whose beauty, haloed by the light of virtue,
Makes earth a very paradise to me.

Enter MAID-SERVANT.
MAID. If you please, ma'am, Mr. Muslin, the draper, wishes to speak with you.

You mustn't think that a bathos, you know. Quite the reverse. This Muslin, the draper, is a most desperate fellow—villain of the piece, you know. He's in love with Mrs. G. on the sly, and the whole interest turns upon his profligate pursuit of her. In the first scene, he only shows her some patterns, you know; but at the end of the first act, she calls at his 'emporium' to look at some more, and then the terrible passion of the man's nature comes out. Mrs. G. chooses a dress, and he rapturously tells her that it is 'the very robe of beauty, and will assuredly sit with matchless grace and beauty on her who is the —' Mrs. G. begs him to 'cease this flattering non-

sense,' or she must instantly leave the place.

MUSLIN. Forgive my excitement, and do not, I humbly pray you, hasten away; I am anxious that these gloves should engage your kind attention. How finely they would fit and grace your lovely hand!

Mrs. G. I cannot allow you to talk so to me in this insulting strain. I will not, sir, indeed.

MUSLIN. You are very beautiful when you are calm; But in a passion you are quite divine; Therefore, let me say, Oh! fairest of the fair,
Hear me, though only for a moment, hear:
If ever beauty could be deemed divine,
And fill man's soul with passion's fire,
That beauty is your own; that soul inflamed
Is mine.

MRS. G. Are you drunk, or are you mad?

MUSLIN. I am both mad and drunk with love for you.

The dazzling beauty of your beaming face,
The grace and elegance of your fair form,
Have filled me with such rapture as my bosom

Never knew till this moment as I stand
Enchanted with their heavenly influence.

Still Mrs. G. is proof even against eloquence such as this, and bids him

In the name of decency outraged,
In the name of virtue thus insulted,
Thus justly made to blush,

to get out of the way, and let her depart from the emporium. But the enamoured draper is not to be moved. If the soft wooing of passion will not suffice, sterner measures must be used. 'Deny me!' he cries,

And I will send you through the streets,
A felon, with a rabble at your heels
Yelling their execrations in your ears;
You shall go forth from hence a thief,
Scoffed at by the basest of your sex
Reeling in their drunken revelry around you.

MRS. G. Oh, hear me!

MUSLIN. I have heard you till I'm sickened with your trash.

Say, dearest, say, is my fond love to meet
A still more fond return?

MRS. G. Virtue, honour, truth, affection, all in
Combination with my marriage vow
Conspire in urging me with indignation
From my soul to thunder in your ears, No!

MUSLIN. Then meet your doom (*rings the bell*).
Police!

And so the wicked draper, who has compelled his sentimental and tender-conscienced but, unfortunately, larcenous shopman to secrete a pair of gloves in Mrs. G.'s muff, hurries her off to the deepest dungeon beneath that—that is to say, to the Marlborough-street station, and there has her promptly committed on a charge of shoplifting. But villany, though successful for a time, is not finally to triumph. Not only is Mr. G. able to retain for his wife the services of a

counsel, who, to use his own glowing words, promises that

I will in all my best exert myself;
All that my skill or judgment can command,
Whatever, with all due propriety,
Can be tho' but remotely brought to bear
Upon your case, shall come with every force!

But it turns out that Mary Mantle and Sally Tape were looking through the door all the time the wicked shopman was about his evil task, and hearing of the trial at the very moment it is in progress at the Central Criminal Court, prevail upon an enthusiastic cabman to drive them thither at top-speed, on the chance of getting paid for his trouble by Mr. G. The result can only be fitly told in the burning words of Mrs. G.'s eloquent counsel. 'Sir,' he says to his grateful client,

I was but an instrument most humble
In the hands of that o'er-ruling Power
Which ever yet fiercely lashed the guilty,
And threw a shield of tenfold brass before
The innocent.

MR. G. But all is yet a mystery most profound;
How did the case, which seemed so hopeless once,

Assume so bright a turn at last?

COUNS. O'erwhelmed with doubt and stunned with horror,
I stood upon the gusty shore and saw
Our vessel tossed about on billows,
Roaring, foaming, running mountains high.
But when I stood expecting to behold
Her dashed, with shattering force against
The rock,
And hurled, a wreck, upon the turbid wave—

These two good creatures came

[*Pointing to MARY MANTLE and SALLY TAPE.*

As by the hand of heaven,
To give her power to stem the waves, and steer

Her to a calm and sheltering harbour,
Whose pleasant waters are so sweetly blue,

And do so clearly mirror her fair form.
Yes; they came and gave their crushing evidence.

Then the omnipotence of truth prevailed—
Her power divine struck every soul with awe:

Foul-hearted perjury
Shrank back and stood aghast;
She could not, dared not, meet the withering glance

Of truth. That is the secret of it all.

"And that is all," said Dick, laying down the MS., and hiding his emotion and his features in the soda-water tumbler.

"Quite sure there's not another original anywhere in the parcel?"

"Quite," said Dick. "You see, old What's-his-name told me he had sent back a lot of the biggest rubbish a week or two ago."

"Did he?" said I.

DOUBLEDAY'S CHILDREN.

BY DUTTON COOK,

AUTHOR OF "YOUNG MR. NIGHTINGALE," "HOBSON'S CHOICE," &c. &c.

BOOK V. THE FURTHER NARRATIVE OF BASIL DOUBLEDAY.

CHAPTER II. A DEPUTATION.

I WAS a contributor to *The Volcano*, but I did not pen its more frantic and stormy articles. I supplied its poets' corner with verse, and I sought to win general sympathy for the poor and suffering among the working-classes. No doubt certain of my songs had a strong political tendency, were animated by something of a revolutionary spirit; the cause of liberty was dear to me, and I felt keenly the social wrongs under which so many of my fellow-countrymen were labouring. Moreover, I always sought to invest my poetry, if I may so speak of it, with a real human interest: to employ it as a means of expressing genuine feeling, whether of joy, or sorrow, of hope, or of despair. I was anxious that my readers should discover in my lines reflection of their own experiences, albeit cast in a poetic form. But much of what I wrote was prompted by a simple love of nature, and a sense of the beauty of everyday objects—the things that are always with us, but which so often, for that very reason, escape our regard—the wild flowers at our feet, the chequered sunshine, the dancing shadows, the dew-drops on the grass, the blue sky, the silver-bordered rain-clouds, the saffron of dawn, the crimson of sunset.

I do not design, however, to weary the reader with a review of my own lucubrations. I have no overweening sense of my merits as a poet. I am now conscious that my writings were often very imitative, owed almost everything to example. In truth, I may say that I had not studied Wordsworth for nothing. With other young authors I strove to tread in the footprints of the elders, regardless of the fact that their stride was longer, their pace swifter than I could compass. Too often my verses were but as the faint reverberations of grand but distant music—for fine notes of poetry stir echoes in all sorts of unexpected places. I may, I hope, without presumption, claim for myself some measure of literary faculty. And, without doubt, a kind of poetry lies well within the reach of every writer who has acquired skill in the use of language, and can

counterfeit an air of passion. But, of course, there is a vast difference between the verses resulting from genuine inspiration, and the quasi-poetic efforts that are, after all, merely exercises in diction. Occasionally, I am now aware, I was but playing the part of poet, my words were borrowed, my sentiments were simulated, I was impelled by second-hand emotions. I wrote less because my muse insisted peremptorily, than to meet the requirements of the journals, or for the gratification of reading my lines in print; for I assumed that, being printed, they would be read and admired by others. Let it be said for me, however, that I was not at the time conscious of insincerity in the matter.

I even ventured to publish a collection of my verses. Mr. Grisdale lent me valuable aid, and the slim little book was printed at a very moderate expense. It was called *Aspirations*, and contained my best songs. I cannot say that any pecuniary profit resulted from this enterprise. I had, indeed, great difficulty in finding a publisher who would undertake, upon any terms, the production of my book. On all sides I was informed that poetry was "a perfect drug in the market;" that was the unvarying phrase. There were poets, it was urged, at the corner of every street, everywhere, anxious to give away their poems to any who would accept them. In fact, everyone was a poet; it had come to that, and the writers were outnumbering the readers. How could I expect, under such conditions, to obtain special distinction? However, the little work in due season issued from the press. It was rather pinched of look, shabbily bound in thin boards, faintly printed on flimsy paper, its pages denied all extravagance of margin. It was as a pauper child of the muses, not one of those pampered bantlings, princes of the printing-house, who are ushered forth luxurious of type, sumptuous in their purple and gold and fine linen, and altogether superb of aspect. Certainly, the sale was not enormous. The publisher informed me that he had "got rid of"—that was the term he preferred to employ—some two hundred copies, I think. Still the poems found some friends. A few of the songs I set to music with the help of Uncle Junius, and these obtained extensive popularity. And the book did me service—proved to be a sort of admission ticket to the profession of letters. It was not much, perhaps, but still it was something to be known as the author of

Aspirations. I had little difficulty now in obtaining employment as an author. Various magazines were opened to me, and I became a contributor to other journals than *The Volcano*. I was credited with special knowledge in regard to the working-classes of London, their ways and means of life. On that account, I was engaged to write in *The Hourglass*, a Liberal morning newspaper, which was devoting much of its space, just then, to the consideration of social grievances and the labour question. I may mention that some articles I contributed on the suffering condition of the silk-weavers of Spitalfields attracted very general attention. *The Hourglass*, however, professed to hold temperate opinions only; I was forbidden to occupy its columns with any advocacy of the Charter.

The Hon. Pierce Plumer lived in Park-lane. His house was what West-end auctioneers call "a bijou residence." There was very little of it, and it seemed tightly wedged in between two enormous mansions. But it was a pretty house enough, with green verandahs, French windows, pink blinds, flowers in the balcony, and festoons of creeping plants.

I was well acquainted with Mr. Plumer's name. He had bought, as I knew, certain pictures, copies made in the National Gallery, by M. Riel; but, in truth, Mr. Plumer was a renowned personage at the time of which I am writing. He occupied almost a unique position in the political world. Of patrician origin, he affected to represent plebeian interests and opinions. He was a dandy democrat; at once a man of fashion and a prolétaire. It was difficult to believe in his perfect sincerity. But a certain versatility he assuredly should be credited with; he seemed as much at home in the chair of an uproarious Chartist meeting as in an operabox. He shone no less in the House of Commons than in the betting-ring or the gaming-house. While addicted to all the vices and follies of fashionable society, he professed to sympathise deeply with the virtues and merits of the humbler classes. He contributed with some liberality to the funds collected in support of the Charter; at the same time it was understood that he was responsible for the debts of the Elysian Theatre, of which the popular actress, Madame Vivienne, was the nominal manager.

He had expressed a desire to receive a deputation of working-men touching the Charter, and the grievances it was to redress. He wanted his hands strengthened,

as he said. He should be better qualified to bring the matter before Parliament after having received the information we were qualified to give. At the same time, he was urgent that we should limit the number of the deputation, owing to the small size of his house. "I can't manage to squeeze more than a dozen into my dining-room," he frankly stated.

He was really a good-natured man, I think. He received us with an air of great cordiality, shaking us each by the hand in turn, and declaring that it gave him much pleasure to see us. I was formally introduced as "the author of *Aspirations*." "Oh ah, yes, of course," he said. It was obvious that he had never heard of the production.

He was middle-aged, and perhaps something more, but he assumed an air of youth, was lively of manner and rapid of utterance. It was understood, however, that his locks, as to hue and quantity, were under obligations to art. He was foppishly dressed, with profuse wristbands, a rich roll of velvet collar surmounting his olive-green frock-coat, and a cataract of black satin stock filling up the opening of his figured silk waistcoat. He was low of stature and dapper of figure. His lavender trousers fitted him very closely indeed, and were tightly strapped under his little lacquered boots. On meeting us he carefully drew off his lemon-tinted gloves, tossing them into his glossy hat, and rubbed his white hands caressingly together, until his turquoise rings clicked together noisily.

"The Charter with its six points," he said, in a light-hearted way; "why not seven? I'm sure I am quite agreeable, and they say there's luck in odd numbers. Well, you know, I'll do the best I can; but it's understood that I reserve to myself liberty of action. I'm not a clock that you can wind up in Spitalfields, and that will strike simply as you bid it in the House of Commons. But I'm with you, I am one of you; don't let there be any mistake about that."

He looked at his watch as he spoke. He was desirous, as I judged, of disposing of the deputation as soon as might be. Two or three of our number—Mr. Grisdale being among them—were certainly anxious to make speeches, had, indeed, brought speeches with them in a bottled-up state, so to speak, and were eager to draw the corks at the first opportunity. But perhaps Mr. Plumer, being a member of the House, had heard as many speeches as he wished to hear, and was too intimate with oratory to have any great respect for it.

"I don't think, you know, we really need have any speechmaking, eh? I understand the matter. You're prepared to go great lengths, any lengths in fact, to obtain what you want. You want people to be quite sure about that, don't you? All the same, you know, you must be careful, in fact, we must all of us be very careful. Now, look here! No collision with the authorities! Not another word about physical force! Meetings?—Yes, by all means, as many as you like and as crowded. Speeches?—Yes; long and strong. Processions?—Without end. Brass bands, banners flying, and loud hurrahs. I've not a word to say against them. Make yourselves heard; let the world know that you're alive and kicking, and very thoroughly in earnest. I would not object to a broken window now and then by way of a change, or even a broken head as a decided protest, upon sufficient provocation being given. But I can't go farther than that. I must really wash my hands of the whole business if you go farther than that." He went through the motions of washing his hands as he spoke; then dropping his colloquial manner, he drew himself up, as though preparing for an oratorical flight. A parliamentary air attended him, he waved his hand aloft, he swayed to and fro, his tones became artificially shrill, he seemed to jerk out his voice as though, like a ball, it must be tossed high to reach a distance. Could it be, I asked myself, that he had ever received lessons in the art of speech from Mr. Toomer Hooton? Certainly there were traces of that elocutionist's manner in Mr. Plumer's delivery of his closing observations. "Gentlemen," he said, "I can make every allowance for reasonable excitement. I am no inattentive observer of current events, and for the cause you have at heart, I have myself perseveringly struggled during many years of my political career. There exists no warmer champion than I am of the rights of labour. I have always advocated the amelioration of society and the emancipation of the sons of toil. I would sow the suffrage broadcast among the people. But I cannot consent to jeopardise a good and just cause by rash conduct, by inflammatory action. In such wise you will but retard the reforms you have at heart. You will hinder the progress of the nation and disappoint and dismay your best friends. No, gentlemen. Do not for one moment imperil the hopes and fair expectations of the people by any foolish

outrage of the law, by any rash conflict with the police. Remember that one false step may seal the fate of millions. But, prudence, caution, and courage, and the day is our own!"

Mr. Plumer waved a scented pocket-handkerchief before him, and then permitted himself to drop into an easy-chair. He seemed conscious of an oratorical triumph of quite a parliamentary character.

"Sherry, James, for these gentlemen," he said to a footman who appeared in the doorway.

It was clear that Mr. Plumer had done with us. The deputation looked a little disconcerted. They had expected that Mr. Plumer would have listened while they discoursed; whereas it was Mr. Plumer who had discoursed, while they had been compelled to listen. There was nothing for it now but to sip the sherry proffered by James, Mr. Plumer's footman, and to depart.

Of course, as a water-drinker upon principle, Mr. Grisdale declined the wine, the while he surveyed, with mingled scorn and curiosity, the livery worn by James. I feared an oratorical outburst. He admitted afterwards that he had been possessed by a strong desire to say a few words upon footmen and their masters, upon calves and plush, and the inner life of the pampered lackey. He contented himself with loudly whispering, "Plumer pretends to be of and for the people; yet he can garb a brother man like that!" I drew him away, to look at a picture of Bacchus and Ariadne, after Titian, that hung opposite the fireplace.

From where we stood we could see a handsome open carriage at Mr. Plumer's door. A lady was reclining gracefully upon its cushions, with a long-eared, blunt-nosed, staring-eyed lapdog beside her. A fringed parasol, of delicate tint, shaded her face. Silk and satin, flowers and lace, jewels, and gold, arrayed her.

"Madame Vivienne," said someone.

Presently she descended from her carriage and entered the house.

"I hope I don't intrude?" she said with a merry laugh, as she appeared in the dining-room, confronting Mr. Plumer and the deputation. "Pray don't let me disturb you, gentlemen. But a lady is allowed to be impatient, and I really couldn't wait any longer at the door; the sun was quite spoiling my complexion."

She was very handsome, with brilliant hazel eyes, well-defined brows, very white even teeth, and red lips which, if rather on a large scale, were perfect in form. Her

voice was delightfully musical, with a sort of jocund trill about it that was most pleasant to hear. There was a sort of theatrical accent about her manner; but she seemed naturally vivacious and mirthful. I judged her to be a trifle older than she desired to be thought, or, indeed, than she looked when viewed, as I had sometimes viewed her, from the pit of the little Elysian Theatre. She was English-born, as I understood, but was the wife or widow of the foreigner whose name she bore.

"It's a deputation I'm receiving," Mr. Plumer began, with rather a confused air and even, I think, a faint blush upon his cheeks.

"Surely," she said, with a gracious smile and a wave of her hand, as though to show how perfectly her primrose gloves fitted. "Very happy to see the gentlemen. They won't mind about the informality of the introduction. Some of them know me already, I'm thinking. This young gentleman, for instance." And she turned suddenly to me. I was made aware that I had been staring at her rather rudely.

"This is Mr.—Mr.— I forget the name," said Mr. Plumer, confusedly. "Author of—of— I beg your pardon; my memory is sadly treacherous."

"Aspirations," someone prompted.

"Aspirations, of course."

"Indeed! It treats of the use and abuse of the letter H, I suppose," said the lady, smiling. "A useful work, I don't doubt; and it ought to have a large public, I'm very sure. I'll take care and recommend it to my friends."

"It's a volume of poems," I ventured to explain.

"Of course it is. What was I thinking about? I have heard of the book. I saw it reviewed in The Sunday Gazette, and they quoted one or two things from it, that I thought were decidedly pretty."

The deputation, wearing rather a baffled and perplexed look, was gradually withdrawing.

"If any of the gentlemen would like an order for the Elysian for any night in the week, they've only to mention it," said Madame Vivienne.

"It's time I went home to my tea," Mr. Gridale whispered to me rather grimly. "I thought we were here upon rather serious business; but, I suppose, Plumer thinks

we ought to conclude, as they do at the theatre, with a laughable farce. A patriot! The man's a mere play-actor! Come away."

Madame Vivienne touched me lightly on the arm.

"You look clever, young gentleman: and your book shows a pretty sort of talent for verse-making. Why not write for the stage? You've never given it a thought? What does that matter? It's easy enough. No sort of invention is required—we borrow all that, as you know—only a trifle of tact and ingenuity." As she spoke she drew from her pocket a crumpled little book with a paper cover. "Now, look at this; here's a French trifle in one act. Try and turn it into tidy English, will you? And throw in a few jokes for Collarby, my low comedian, will you? You know the sort of fun that Collarby likes. If you could manage a song for me it would be all the better. I shall play Suzanette; but, of course, you will call her Susan in the English version. Something arch, and gay, and bright, you know. When shall I hear from you? Send the thing to the theatre when you've finished it. The sooner the better. Or, bring it to the theatre yourself. Send in your name, insist upon seeing me, and don't go away until you have seen me. That's the only way at the Elysian. Now, good-bye; God bless you!"

I left her, with the sounds of her merry, melodious voice trilling in my ear, and with the little French play grasped in my hand.

It was entitled, *L'Oncle de ma Tante*.

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